Interoperable Communications

The National Task Force on Interoperability published a document titled "Why Can't We Talk" and it defines interoperability as "...*the ability of public safety agencies to talk to one another via radio communication systems – to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed."*[7] In the publication, "*Statement of Requirements for Public Safety Wireless Communications & Interoperability*" published by the Department of Homeland Security's SAFCOM Program opens the section on "Public Safety Requirements and Roles" by stating, "*Public safety operations require effective command, control, coordination, communication, and sharing of information with numerous criminal justice and public safety agencies, as well as public utilities, transportation companies, and private industry. Thousands of incidents that require mutual aid and coordinated response occur every day. High-profile incidents, such as bombings or plane crashes, test the ability of public safety service organizations to mount well-coordinated responses. In an era where technology can bring news, current events, and entertainment to the farthest reaches of the world, many law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical service (EMS) personnel cannot communicate with each other during routine operations let alone during major emergencies, such as the Oklahoma City Bombing."*[8]

There are more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States. Approximately 95 percent of these agencies employ fewer than 100 sworn officers. Additionally, there are over 32,000 fire and EMS agencies across the Nation. Due to the fragmented nature of this community, most public safety communications systems are stovepipe, or individual systems that do not communicate with one another or facilitate interoperability. Just as the public safety community is fragmented, so is radio spectrum. Public safety radio frequencies are distributed across four isolated frequency bands from lowband VHF (25-50 MHz) to 800 MHz (806-869 MHz).